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A LITERARY LEGEND: "THE ORIENTAL"

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A literary legend has been developed, which sets in sharpest opposition the so-called Orient and the fondly named Occident. Poet, dramatist, sentimental writer, novelist and maker of sensational machinery for the stage, picture show and quick-selling newspaper, have created the "Oriental" of imagination, fancy, prejudice and bigotry, who has no counterpart in reality, or has ever existed. It has become a "vested interest," a staple and stock in trade, a permanent and ever-promising speculation to picture "the Oriental" as a being in human form whose nature is fundamentally different from the "Occidental." Such a delineation and contrast has mercantile value. It pays in what the American loves so dearly—money. It increases the sale of tickets at the box office. It enlarges the circulation of the newspapers. It delights the mob. The vote seeking politician approves as if it were soundest orthodoxy. It has ever been used in certain varieties of pulpit ministration and missionary propaganda to buttress the dogmas supposed to be of Christian origin.

The creation of this ideal person, "the Oriental," is a comparatively modern affair. We look in vain in the ancient literatures to find him. The greatest of all libraries throws no direct light on "the race problem." The first Christian saints know nothing of his whereabouts.

The religions came out of Asia. The thought of the mother continent is the basis of all European faiths. Yet, though religion is the deepest thing in man, the men who made our religions, the Orientals, are supposed to be separated from us proud Occidentals by an unplummetted abyss of mental differences. The binding thread of all human history is the reaction of "the East" upon "the West." Over and over again has "Europe" precipitated itself on

Asia, as in the raids of conquest by Alexander and the waves of wild fanaticism gendered during the crusades, when the European peoples weltered in ignorance and superstition. Huns and Mongols, Saracens and Moors have shown like energies in return. The legions have thundered past, but the European marauders have but slightly disturbed "the East" that "bowed in thought again."

History makes no denial of the fact that in the only belt of the world's area that has any notable history, there have been action and reaction; but these phenomena, so far from proving that Asiatics and Europeans are in any way fundamentally different, do but demonstrate that they are the same. Identical in the passions of animal instincts, greed, pride, ambition, conceit, and race hatred, they are one. In both the world of Islam, of India and of China, the poet, singer, fiction writer and maker of pictures, whether in word, by pencil, or in pigment do the same work of exaggeration and misrepresentation, by appeal to local ethnic or religious feeling that has no basis in science. Race-hatred, ignorance, instinctive, that is, animal repulsion of every sort and kind are increased by orator, writer, and artist for a purpose. Compare the mountain range of the literature of caricature and the appeal to passion and selfish motives with the paucity of truth, of knowledge and of exact information. In most popular or ever salable histories of "the world," one-fourth of the whole of it and of the race usually get a small fraction of the last volume in a series of twelve or more. Our atlases, that devote scores of pages to counties, states and countries, usually give to China and Japan, a corner and to all of Asia a single page. How many of our states know anything authentic, trustworthy or at first hand, of India's or China's history? What is "Orientalism" as depicted on the stage, in novels, popular magazines, or in books which are seriously read by other than a small minority.

The "Orientalism" which sells, for which editors will pay, which "goes" on the theatre boards, which gets up periodical war scares and from nervous congressmen compels votes for big battleships, or which is set forth by poli-

ticians bidding for votes is not intrinsically different from that which was and is dearly loved in Europe. Fashion, in Tom Moore's time, fed on it. It is still a "Frenchy" commodity, that is ever in demand in the literary and theatrical world. Yet probably in no country more than in the United States of America, is our legacy of prejudice against "the Oriental" so worked in the interest of dollars and cents.

Our grandmothers were thrilled by the sort of "Orientalism" dished up for them by Moore, Byron, Coleridge and Scott. We get our mess from Kipling, Brother Hobson, the Sand Lots, Mr. Hearst's newspapers, some senators, numerous editors and playwrights, and makers of photo plays.

What a pretty story Agnes Repplier has told of the Orientalism afforded by text-books—the kind that England loved. The staple consisted of the Lake of Cashmere, harems, slave markets, Georgians, dark-eyed Arab girls, and Moorish Lochinvars, with plenty of gazelles, poodles, etc. Pathetic indeed were the attempts of Moore to adjust Lalla Rookh and his other Orientalisms to the established conventions of London Society and the British constitution! It was indeed difficult to temper his particular variety of Orientalism so as to chasten its form for the reading of boys and girls, for whom "Sanford and Merton" was considered proper.

We today may laugh at the opinions of Tom Moore's contemporaries, that he was "familiar with the grandest regions of the human mind, that he showed "entire familiarity with the life, nature and learning of the East," and was "purely and intensely Asiatic" in the detachment of his mind and in his poetical delineations. Why not when turbans and "Oriental" drapery were worn at balls, when fine ladies sported the dress of sultanas and houris, and stout British matrons wore rainbow-striped gauze frosted with gold—until Thackeray mocked at such tomfoolery and drove the dim ghost of Lalla Rookh first into the rural districts and then out of educated England. Nevertheless it still persists at the country fairs and itinerant pennyshows.

Yet behold what food our American gods feed upon, from the United States Senate to the San Francisco hoodlums. In quest of fame, dollars, votes, congressional appropriations for a colossal navy, what will not our newspapers permit and our fellow-sovereigns believe? Consult files of our journals, especially, and monthlies since the Russo-Japan war. Behold the unspeakable Chinese, who with "trickery" and "cunning," maintains a subterranean harem of white women. Descry that innumerable horde that is about to overwhelm us from China. Mark those regiments of Japanese ex-soldiers drilling in Hawaii! See the multitudinous kodaks which Japanese spies are leveling at our forts. See Magdalena Bay surveyed for the Mikado's fortifications. Can the valor of ignorance go farther than some of our half-dime picture shows, in depicting the set determination of the Tokyo statesmen to reduce the United States to a colony of Japan? One can almost descry Togo and his fleet off the coast while some possibly wait, in agony of alarm, to hear his chains rattle that let down the anchors of his warships in San Francisco Bay.

Hardly less sensational in their effect are the horrid phases and over-tinted pictures of Japanese life, country and people made by the lackadaisical school of writers. These picture the Mikado's soldiers as demigods, the Japanese harlots and geishas as paragons, and Japan as an unspoiled Eden. Of course the Japanese women excel Eve, Venus, Martha Washington and Queen Victoria, but the men are ugly, tricky and capable of all meanness and villainy.

As to the unreality of all this, an American at least not bound to take European tradition as truth, should be heartily ashamed. The exaggeration of falsehood, whether in praise or blame, should have no lodgement in the mind of one who lives on a continent, destined to be the middle term between Europe and Asia, and who loves the truth. I, for one, after forty-six years' knowledge of the Japanese people and nearly forty years' acquaintance with Chinese youth and men, do not recognize "the Oriental" of popular imagination. A scarecrow is not to be mistaken for a living man, nor a flatterer's version for a true translation. To

one who has lived among the Japanese and knows something of their history, literature, and art it is impossible to agree with the impressionist Hearn, or the vile traducer whose motive, directly or indirectly, is fame or cash. The writers like Hearn and Sir Edwin Arnold, who overpraise and idealize the men, women and things of Nippon do, in reality set store chiefly upon what the twentieth century Japanese is ashamed of and has justly banished to the moles and bats. Those who overpraise the Chinese in order chiefly, like the deists of the eighteenth century, to strike at the Christian religion, or, in our time, to sneer at the missionaries, belong in much the same class as those who raise the nightmare of a "Mongolian" invading horde, or a mass of "moon-eyed lepers" corrupting the guileless Americans.

After nearly the whole of an adult life spent directly or indirectly with "the Orientals," as in large part were the lives of my father and grandfather before me, and with an honest perseverance and fairly steady industry in research, I see absolutely no difference in the human nature of an Asiatic, a European or an American. From the point of view of science, no fundamental difference exists that should prevent mutual respect, appreciation, social intercourse and in time naturalization and full recognition of humanity. The ignorance and prejudice that now exist on this whole subject is a disgrace to America and to our Christianity. Sooner or later, we must acknowledge that Asia has been the great mother of inventions, art, science and religion and as she has always been the teacher of Europe while Europe has for the most part but developed and applied, so now. "The Orientals" have more to teach us than we can possibly teach them. Mutual respect of persons and civilization and interchange of ideas and products will stimulate the evolution of the race towards the perfect man and the intimate civilization. In this work, America which is neither in the Orient nor the Occident, should lead the world. To the man of science there is no East nor West, they being purely expressions for convenience of speech and thought.